

Marriage Relationships

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Date: 27 May 2018

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[0 : 00] And we said last week that we are living in the aftermath of the social and cultural revolution of the 1960s. The era of free love, of sexual liberation and individual selfism has so infected our culture that to still hold a traditional and biblical view on sex and marriage and singleness is to declare yourself a revolutionary or a radical.

Our culture is increasingly confused about the nature of marriage. And so that means any talk from the Bible is bound to be revolutionary thinking.

And in 25 minutes, we can't possibly give a complete picture as to what the Bible says about marriage. And so for the sake of this talk, I'm going to avoid some areas deliberately.

But please do push back on me in the question time if there's an aspect of marriage that I haven't covered. We're going to stick to two main texts today, Genesis 2 and 1 Corinthians 7, which were our readings.

And today I want us to see that marriage is from God. Marriage is for sex. Marriage is for keeps. And marriage is where you are.

[1 : 21] Those are the four points on your handout. And I also want to say right at the beginning, I just want to put my hand up and say, I've only been married for five years. And so please today, please don't hear me barking at you.

I know lots of you have much more experience in life, much more marriage experience than me. We're going to be talking about marriage and divorce today.

And I know that they are tricky topics and painful topics for lots of people in the room. I want to be respectful of all the circumstances that are here today.

It's also important to note that no one, no one is a worse sinner than anyone else. We're all failures. We're all flawed when it comes to relationships.

All our bodies have a history. Today will not be a sort of a finger wagging session. But please hear this as an arm around you talk today.

[2 : 21] We're just going to take an honest look at what the Bible says about marriage. And so if you've got your handouts, that'd be great. And if you could turn your Bibles to our first reading, that's Genesis 2. So Genesis 2 on page 2 to 3 of your Bibles.

Now here at the beginning of the Bible, we're at the beginning of the Bible. So we are talking about foundational things. Genesis 1 tells us that you're either God or something made by God.

God is the creator. He made all of life very good. That's what Genesis 1 tells us. Human beings, people, we're given extra attention.

We're given the whole of chapter 2. In chapter 2 verse 4, it says, This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

This is foundational thinking about our world. Here are some things our creator wants us to know about him and about ourselves.

[3 : 24] Have a look at verse 18, chapter 2 verse 18. Now the Lord God said, It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

Now this is not, as some people teach it, that man was merely lonely. Poor bloke. He got tired of talking to the trees. He needed someone else to ride on his tandem bicycle with him.

No. We're told that Adam doesn't need another for companionship, but for help. On his own, man is not good enough to do the work God commanded.

He is unfit for purpose and needs another. And so in verse 19 to 20, a search for a supermodel is undertaken. It's a search for a suitable helper amongst all the other creatures.

But verse 20, Poor old Adam, no suitable helper was found. Suitable here in Genesis means corresponding.

[4 : 30] That is, no creature on earth corresponds to Adam or perfectly fits and complements him. And so in verse 21 to 22, the Lord God made woman.

And Adam is so happy that he writes the very first Valentine's card. Verse 23, You see, now there is two separate people, but so united that Adam says, Her bone is of my bones and her flesh is of my flesh.

It's a picture of two separate fleshs, two separate bones, but actually deeply united. And here comes our crucial verse about marriage.

Verse 24, That is why a man leaves his father and mother. It is a public leaving from mum and dad's house. And he's united to his wife.

It is a permanent union. And they become one flesh. It is physically sealed with sex. Have a listen to what the Anglican marriage liturgy says.

[5 : 51] Marriage is the lifelong union in which a man and a woman are called so to give themselves in body, mind and spirit. Is that unity language? And so to respond that from their union will grow a deepening knowledge and love of each other.

And then it says, What therefore God has joined together, let no one put asunder. And this is revolutionary thinking in our culture.

A few years back when I was in London working as an accountant, I was in the office and as you do in an office team, you start talking about everything except work. And people started talking about marriage.

And I said, Well, I think, you know, God invented marriage. He created it. And Genesis, you know, tells me why. And all the people there became really venomous. And one person in particular started getting so angry.

They said, Marriage is a man-made social construct. It's a mere economic arrangement to subjugate women. That's what I was told. But that is not the happy and loving picture you get from Adam and Eve.

[7 : 00] The Anglican liturgy says, I do promise to love and to cherish. With all that I have, I honor you. It's not a picture of dominance here, nor an arrangement for mere financial benefit.

And in a room this size, when talking about marriage, we're going to talk about same-sex marriage. And I know that many people here will be affected by this, either directly or through family and friends.

And so I don't say this stuff lightly. I know that this is hard to hear. I have quite a few friends I've had since I was a little kid who are same-sex attracted. And this past year in Australia has been quite difficult for everyone.

Friendships have been ruined. So we don't say this lightly. But again, just an honest look at what the Bible says. While a same-sex union can be public, and it can be permanent, there is love and commitment there.

No one's doubting that. But a same-sex couple can't achieve the same one-flesh sexual union. Here in the Bible, marriage is defined for a man and a woman who correspond, who complement one another, who are suitable in a way that no other two creatures are.

[8 : 30] And again, I know this is hugely controversial, hugely revolutionary thinking. But these are foundational verses to life, to Christianity.

Jesus and Paul both quote these verses. They summarize the Bible's ethic on sex and marriage. But please do push back on me in the Q&A; if you doubt the Bible's authority here.

We'd love to help people think through these issues more and more. So marriage is from God. But marriage is for sex.

And this is our second point. And can you please turn to our second reading, which is on page 1146. So turn to page 1146. So 1 Corinthians.

And we've spent, in this church, we've spent a lot of time in 1 Corinthians lately. And when it came to sex and their bodies, the Corinthians thought, 6 verse 12, on the left-hand side, they thought, I have the right to do anything, they said.

[9 : 40] And, in verse 13, they said, Food for the stomach and the stomach for food. And God will destroy them both. You see, just like Melbourne, the Corinthians thought their bodies was just there for their appetites.

Like food. So sex, that's just another appetite. Your body will be in the ground soon. Do what you like today. That is the ethic of Corinth.

That is the ethic of Melbourne. But the Apostle Paul presents a completely revolutionary view. Halfway through verse 13, he says, The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.

And the Lord for the body. By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead. He will raise us also. And have a look at the end of chapter 6.

The very end of chapter 6, it says, Therefore, honour God with your bodies. And that command, to honour God with our bodies, that functions like a heading for the whole of chapter 7.

[10 : 45] So the first half of chapter 7, honour God in your marriage. Next week, the second half, honour God in your singleness. You see, the Corinthians thought that sex was a dirty thing.

And so in chapter 7, they said, It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Woman here is best understood as wife. Some married men were pretending to be single again by abstaining from sex with their wives.

And Paul says, If you're married, have sex. If you're married, have sex. And now, because of age or illness or perhaps another life change, sex is not an easy option or not a plausible option for lots of couples.

And so, I think the language of intimacy is also appropriate here. One of the first ways that married people can honour God with their bodies is to have sex.

You see, God is not embarrassed or negative about sex the way I am. God designed it to be the superglue for a lifelong union of a man and a woman in marriage.

[12 : 08] I wonder, do you believe in a God that loves sex, who keeps directing married people to sleep together or be intimate?

And Paul gives us two reasons why this is the case. And so, firstly, because of temptation. So, 7 verse 2, But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband.

And then again, halfway through verse 5, Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you. Why? Because of your lack of self-control.

And you get the same picture in verse 9. God says that sex is a protective measure. Last week, the command was to flee sexual immorality.

But the main way you can help your spouse to do that is to have sex or be intimate. Do you want to protect your marriage from temptation? Do you want to protect your marriage from adultery?

[13 : 12] Maybe the answer is not to meet your accountability partner but to meet your spouse and turn the telly off. Marriage is good because of temptation.

Let's look at the second reason married people should have sex. And the reason is because your body isn't yours. Your body isn't yours. If you are married, you have given your spouse a lifetime leasehold on your body.

It's theirs for life. And you can see that in verse 3. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

See, verse 3 is the language of duty and verse 4 is the language of authority. Notice also it is completely mutual. No one has greater authority over the other.

[14 : 16] These verses cannot be used for one to demand sex whenever they want. They cannot be used when one wants to make the other one fulfill their perverse desires.

That is to become a Corinthian. That is to treat sex like a mere appetite. Paul says in verse 5, he says, don't deprive one another or don't deprive each other.

And deprive here is the same word as defraud or steal. Paul says when it comes to sex in marriage, don't defraud your spouse.

Isn't that revolutionary thinking? When we got married, when you got married, you said, with my body I honour you. We all heard you.

But the sharp challenge today is how often do we break that promise? When we lazily get out of sex or intimacy with our spouse, we are stealing from them, says Paul.

[15 : 23] Now, thankfully, there's no Christian performance chart. I don't know what that would look like. Thankfully, it doesn't exist. No two couples are alike. In the privacy of your own marriage, you will have to decide what is appropriate for you to maintain faithfulness.

Do let your conscience guide you as you are convicted. But this is how married people can honour God with their bodies. This is revolutionary thinking because our culture still says, no, no, even in marriage, I still own my body.

Sex can become a bargaining or manipulation device. Or more commonly, sex is the last resort when there's nothing on telly. Or even worse still, it's just an appetite or something there to fulfil my own selfish desires.

Here's the thing. I think it would be perfectly fine to cancel a dinner date with friends because you want to have sex. I'm going to leave it to you to explain to your friends why you're cancelling the dinner date.

The Bible is silent on that. But the revolutionary idea here is that marriage is a one flesh, shared body, owned situation.

[16 : 46] If this is the person God has placed you with in marriage, have sex or be intimate. It is an important part of your marriage. Be content.

Have sex with the person you are married to. Marriage is from God, marriage is for sex, and now marriage is for keeps. This is our third point.

In Australia, I looked on the government websites this week, in Australia the divorce rate is just about 50%. And that's across the board as well, averaging out.

So not just amongst people 40 and under like me, or 41 and under. Sorry. Divorce is a really high statistic in people who have been married for 25 years or more.

Divorce is common in Christian circles. Many people in this room will be touched and affected by divorce. But apart from the odd exception of adultery, desertion, or abuse, the Bible's basic teaching is that marriage is for keeps.

[17 : 56] Have a look at verse 10. To the married I give this command, not I, but the Lord, that is Jesus. This is Jesus speaking now. A wife must not separate from her husband.

And at the end of verse 11, and a husband must not divorce his wife. Even for separated people, Jesus commands them to remain single.

He wants to allow the possibility that they could become reunited or reconciled. That's what verse 11 says. But if she does separate, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

See, Jesus thinks the one flesh married union is stronger than any call for divorce. Even when your spouse is not even a believer, even when they're totally different to you, that's what verses 12 and 13 say.

But the teaching is still the same. He must not divorce her, she must not divorce him. Paul says in verse 14 that through the marriage they might even become a believer.

[19 : 05] In verse 15, Paul permits a separation or a divorce, but only when the unbelieving partner deserts the marriage. Then he says, let it be so. Now, our culture still says that divorce is an acceptable option.

that if you fall out of love or are no longer happy, then it's an acceptable alternative. Don't stay together just for the kids, we're told.

For Christians too, sometimes our spouses are pretty lazy when it comes to their faith. Sometimes they don't read the Bible as much as we like or pray as much as we want them to.

It's always tempting to think I'd be much more godly with a more godly spouse. Can I trade this old model in? Is the grass greener on the other side?

Let me just look over my shoulder. Paul says that marriage is for keeps. This is the situation God has called you to. I was best man for a really good friend of mine overseas in London and he and his fiancée, they were Christians in our church.

[20 : 15] He was really high up in the church council, you know, he's serving as the church legal help. And from day one, day one, their marriage was a disaster.

It was an absolute disaster. It was public. Everyone in the church could see it. And almost instantly, the day after their honeymoon, they went straight into marriage counselling with the minister of my church.

And they were in marriage counselling for a year. until they got separated later. But I asked my minister, I said, what do you say to these people week after week?

You keep meeting with them. What are you saying to them in such a desperate situation? Or what I thought was a no-win hopeless situation? And this is what he said. He said, I told them, you promised.

You promised. And he's right. When you get married, you promise in front of your family and friends, in front of God, this is what you say. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.

[21 : 23] And I know that's not easy to hear, but I take it therefore that divorce should never be mentioned in the home. It should never be entertained nor threatened.

It should never be put on the table. This is revolutionary thinking in our culture where 50% of marriages end in divorce.

And I know that this is a strong position and I know that this affects a lot of people in the room, but we still live in the real world. If you are affected by divorce but wanted to become a Christian or you are a Christian, please, please don't think that you are somehow a second class of Christian.

That is to wrongly assume that you are too bad for Jesus. Please don't think you would be less part of this church family if divorce has touched your life in some way.

That is to wrongly assume the rest of us have somehow got perfect marriages or we're so superior. Please don't not become a Christian because when it comes to marriage and divorce, you think Jesus' blood, is not strong enough and powerful enough to redeem you and to wash you, to give you a new start.

[22 : 46] Marriage is from God, marriage is for sex, marriage is for keeps and finally marriage is where you are. And just to finish, okay, here I go.

I wonder, have you ever looked at your spouse and thought, do you know what? I could do a lot better. Don't, don't look at your spouse. Don't look all eyes on me.

When it comes to your marriage, have you ever been tempted to think, you know what, the grass is greener on the other side. I'm sure I would be happier with someone else. Have you ever looked at another married couple and thought, do you know what, I think God has made a mistake on that one.

they are much better apart. See, that's what the first century Corinthians thought. Their married men were pretending to be single. Their single people were pretending or wishing they were married.

That's next week. The grass was always greener. They were always looking over their shoulders. And that is what our culture thinks. I think that's what life teaches in some way.

[23 : 54] because the truth is, for married adults, in your married life, you will meet five other people, at least five other people you could easily marry.

In your married life, you will meet at least five other people you could easily marry. And our culture says, go for it. If you would be happier with someone else and are convinced the grass is greener, you are fine to change your circumstances.

But Paul says, chapter 7 verse 17, nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

Paul says, if you are married, this is where God has called you. He has bought you, he has made you, he knows what he was doing when he assigned the situations of our lives.

So let's stop looking over our shoulders and just get on with life as he has called us. it is at the chest therapist